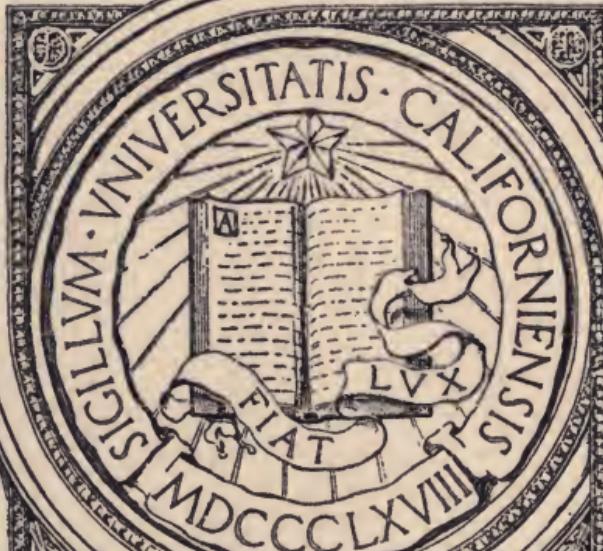


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INTERPRETATIONS

INTERPRETATIONS

A BOOK OF FIRST POEMS

BY

ZOË AKINS



NEW YORK

MITCHELL KENNERLEY

1912

Many of these poems have been reprinted
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following magazines :—*Harper's Monthly*,
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TO
“ONE LYRIC WOMAN”
MY FRIEND, JULIA MARLOWE
I DEDICATE THIS
BOOK OF FIRST VERSE

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ERRATA

p. 34, *line 5*, for “brown” read “blown”

p. 61, *line 6*, for “head” read “hand”

p. 69, *line 5*, for “Dost” read “Does”

MARY MAGDALEN

I

IN HER HOUSE

LET there be light ! Bring lamps ! Bring flowers !

Bring wine !

Lock out this dream-accurséd aching dusk !

Send slaves to bid the guests ; lay out my robes,

Vermilion-coloured, and my golden veils ;

Strew all my jewels where mine eyes may choose

The deepest amethysts or palest pearls

Or such rich rubies as commemorate

The loves of kings. Pour forth our pomp to-

night,

And let our banquet shame this beggared land.

Go, staring girl,—your great eyes make me

laugh !

II

MARY MAGDALEN

And do my bidding swiftly ; let this house
Be decked with garlands,—garlands everywhere !
Prepare the feast ; set forth the cups of gold
That Cæsar had from Carthage ; let the plate
Be all of silver ; and with rosy fruit
Heap high the copper trays from Syracuse.
Fill alabaster urns with fragrant spice ;
And bid the serving-girls unloose their hair,
Wearing white kirtles knotted Roman-wise
And twined with flower-wreaths round their
tender limbs.

Then when this sickly twilight time has passed
Send in to me the Greek Autonoë.
Out, slave ! And hasten . . .

When the guests have come
They shall see Mary as they saw her once,
Before her soul grew strange and dreams took
hold

MARY MAGDALEN

On her mad brain. . . . To love oneself is
best. . . .

I loved my subtle face that said to men
Whatever it was bade by mood of mine.

I loved my movements, insolent and proud,
For insolent and proud my spirit was.

My voice, my words, my thoughts,—my life I
loved;

And all my vibrant nights, and all my days
That rose like fountain-waters in the sun
And fell into the silent jar of Time,

And troubled me no more. I was myself.

My life was mine, the well-tuned instrument
From which I drew the harmonies that beat
Against my soul for lyric utterance.

No vision-seeing sculptor of the Greeks
Hews with more care to change his dream to
stone

Than I have wrought to make my whole life tell

MARY MAGDALEN

Of visions, and of dreams,—of my desire
For life and love and beauty,—and my need
Of saying what I am, and what I seek.
The endless wonder in a poet's heart,
At all things strange and fair and passionate,
Surged in the cry my youth sent up to life.
I asked—and asked,—what should a woman do
What should a woman be, who would not live
Dumbly from birth to death, and leave no sign
That she had come and gone, save newer lives
Sprung from her own to linger, and repeat
This vanity, futility, disease ;
For I who walk this way but once, I said,—
I will not be, while yet I live and feel,
Crushed by the everlasting weight of years .
For when I die, and am no more—I die.
But till the grave-worms gnaw and leave me dust
I live ! Some yearning in my soul arose,
And I desired to mix among the stars

MARY MAGDALEN

And kindle some bright flame to be my sign
When I—borne outward by the ebb of Time—
Felt in my face the shattering wind of Death,
And gave my body to the sifting dust !

The immortality of souls to me
Was a vain dream and bitter, vexing those
Who were afraid of life and longed for rest,
And yet who cried against oblivion,—
As weary children fret to stay awake,
And at the same time sleep. Life after death ?
Why else the repetition of the Spring ?
This was the thought the wise men pondered on ;
And every shore around the winding sea
Sounded the question to the empty skies,
Asking the Future if the spirit lived
To reach a final heaven, vast and calm,
A place of beauty and enduring peace.
From such a mystical eternity

MARY MAGDALEN

I shuddered back; for though the soul lived
on,

Would it not mourn for its lost mortal veil
Of sheltering hair, perchance, and fleeting grace
Of lips and eyes and softly moving limbs—
Once so well loved? Man draws a heavy
breath,

And dreamless sleep should be the end of life.

I knew not whence I came, nor where I went,
But out of the keen energy of thought
Was I resolved to make my life a thing
That should remain in memory of man,
As written lore remains, or monuments
Builded of bronze and marble, or made rich
Of gold and silver. I should make myself
The masterpiece of my imagining,
And leave my fame to linger as a myth
When I should be no more, and no more know
Pleasure nor passion, nor the sun nor moon.

MARY MAGDALEN

The murmur in the sea-shell matters less
To crying oceans shaken by the wind,
Than do the rumours of my shame to me ;
For many name me shameful in the land,—
I, who have made myself the sole fair thing
In this lone loathsome desert,—I, who am
The lily of the valley, and the rose
That blooms by Sharon ; I, the woman scorned,
Am too imperial for scorn to touch !

For what is heaven but beauty ? What is fair,
Save what the mind desires ? And my desire
Has been to live as some wise idle queen,
Who for a space of numbered days and nights
Knows that her throne is hers, her kingdom safe
Against invasion, and is not afraid.
And thus I live ; great rooms within my house
Are rich with treasures from all travelled ways ;
And from the North the galleys bring to me

MARY MAGDALEN

The fairest girls for slaves, the wisest men
And most far-famed for lovers; and my mind,
With much strange knowledge and the consciousness
 ness

Of other minds, has ranged afar in life,
And found life fair. My body, like a harp
Set in a wind, has thrilled with many tunes
And with the burden and the ache of joy,
That surges like a song and ebbs like sobs;
But there has been some thing as delicate
As a girl's touch in every kiss I gave,—
Some star still shining through the blinding
 storm,

Some folded flower unopened by the sun!
Shy, wistful, and aloof, my soul has stood,
Untouched by passion and unscared by pain,
Through all these sweet, brief, listless, idle years.
The maiden whose pale face has flushed but once,
From her sole lover's look, has lived less pure

MARY MAGDALEN

Than in the deep seclusion of my heart
I lived in ultimate virginity,—
Possessed by none, belonging to myself.
Lovers have been my friends, or slaves,—but I,
A queen unto whose kingdom came no king . . .
Until He came. . . . To love oneself is
best. . . .

No more the sapphire in a silver ring
Can give me perfect pleasure, nor the glow
Of Tyrian tapestries from Eastern tents ;
My chalice filled with wine I leave untouched ;
I cannot eat of honey nor of wheat,
Pomegranates, purple grapes, nor golden figs.
No longer am I glad to catch the songs
Autonoë for ever sings of love ;
It does not bring me peace to watch the wind
Bow down the olive grove, like some great hand
Drawn o'er the tree-tops as o'er bending heads.

MARY MAGDALEN

What if my hands be white,—mine eyes like
pools

Made deeper by the shade of standing reeds?

What if my house be still and beautiful?

My slaves as fair and fleet and soft of foot

As Aphrodite's doves? What if I live

As long in legend as that Spartan queen

For whom a war was made in perished Troy,

And whose gold hair shall flame when stars are
dark?

I care no more to watch the wandering moon

Launched like a burning galley in the sky,

Or swinging like a lantern through the clouds,—

And from the even-hour I hide my head. . . .

Ay . . . from the even-hour I shrink and hide,
And strive to shut out silence from my heart;
And move my thoughts about, and praise myself,
And hurry past the empty days and nights;

MARY MAGDALEN

And then, in piteous ways prepare my house,
And wrap myself in garments pure and white,
As if to welcome some most precious guest,—
Who never comes . . . and then, remembering,
I sit and stare at nothing, and repeat
His words . . . His words which are like sudden
flames,
Or chill fair lilies, or the dew at dusk.
His voice is as the flowing of a river.
He promises the sick and blind and halt,
Who but believe on Him, a place in heaven.
His eyes are clearer than unclouded skies ;
His mouth is tender and compassionate ;
One cannot look too long upon His face,
To humbly touch His garment at the hem
Is to be healed an instant of the world.

The God He calls His Father I deny.
His mission is a romance and a dream.

MARY MAGDALEN

His promise of eternal life I scorn.
He teaches that the body leaves the grave
And lives for ever—as the modern Greeks
Dare but surmise the soul, released, might live ;
And yet with fasting He has scourged the flesh,
And has denied the very touch of hands
With which the wayfarers of earth are cheered ;
And to the faultless beauty and the joy
Belonging to the body, he is blind ;
If it is but a vessel for the wine,
A lamp set here in life to hold the flame,
Why should its worthless weight be drawn from
earth
To join its wingéd mate, the separate soul ?

Sweet were the nights I talked till dawn with
friends,
And sweeter still the nights that breathed romance
Upon the easy wonder of light love ;

MARY MAGDALEN

Sweet were the kisses that by starlight fell
And soothed with pleasure life's long loneliness,
Leaving indifference, and never shame
Or restless grief to follow, or the scorn
Of one's own self for giving overmuch—
Mary, remember ! Shame and grief and scorn
Once visited that darkened room of life,
So long ago,—when passion-scourged and weak
You lay with love, still-born, against your breast,
And wept that once, that night in Magdala,—
When Judas with a kiss betrayed your youth.

II

ON A MOUNT

Am I myself? Am I that courtesan
Who left the city of Capernaum
When this same perfect moon was but a shell

MARY MAGDALEN

Of slender light in this same perfect sky ?
The dead space is not filled with many days
From then till now . . . but I have followed far.
My face within the mirror of a well
Seems as a face I never saw before. . . .
Among all women was I once unique ;
Great ladies asked my friendship, and old men
Too grey for love, but given to long thoughts.
Master and student mingled at my feast.
Joanna journeyed oft' from Herod's court
To stay within my house ; and once there came
The mad princess herself,—wan Salomé,
Who never speaks, but dreams with frightened
eyes
And lips that stir as if to take a kiss. . . .
The world grows strange. A child sleeps in mine
arms ;
Its mother lies in prayer upon the grass.
The lepers gather yonder by the road.

MARY MAGDALEN

A starving beggar breaks his bread with me ;
And there, so brightly pale, with head bowed
down,
His mother sits ; it is a lovely thing
To see her listen to His words, made meek
For very pride ; sometimes she seems afraid,
And wonders at her Son, but she is kind,
And wears the scarf I gave her while she slept.
Joanna too is here, and rests her head,
Weeping, upon her arm, against my knee. . . .

Now coming toward our motley multitude,
Surrounded by the Twelve, the Master moves.
Day dawning in a vale is not so fair
As His approach. . . . He speaks. . . . I must
arise
And go my way. . . . His kingdom is of heaven ;
My kingdom is of earth. . . . I will return.
This pain I will not bear. I must arise

MARY MAGDALEN

And seek the self that I have lost through Him.
I am grown weary of my soul's delight
Before his face. . . . I was myself. . . . I am
A shadow following His outstretched hand. . . .
I will lie down amid the winding-sheets
Within the tomb of life, and leave no more
The darkened chamber for the searing light.
Farewell, Thou Son of Man! Farewell, O
Christ!

(Ah, hadst Thou looked but once into mine eyes !)
Thou art the Lily in a field of weeds.
Thou art the Stranger who hast come and gone,
And left my house a sad and empty place.
Thou art the Rain that nevermore shall drench
The fading grasses on a parchéd plain.
Farewell ! I am grown strangely still and strong.
I could pluck out mine own offending eye,
Or from this arm cut this offending hand ;

MARY MAGDALEN

I could go hence and let my dearest dead
Bury their dead,—not looking backward once.
Thus do I go ! I have plucked out my love.
I go forth free. Thy voice I hear no more. . . .
But I shall never sleep a dreamless sleep,
Or move again, unhaunted, through my house,
Or lift my head, or laugh, or be at peace—
O Prince of Peace—I would that Thou wert—
dead !

III

AT THE CROSS

Thy mother weeps. The watchers bend with
prayer.
The soldiers groan and ask what they have done.
The skies are dark. They say the Veil is rent.
The earth is shaken ; and the people wail

MARY MAGDALEN

And gnash their teeth, and call upon the hills
To cover them and hide them from their God.
The tumult mingles with an awful hush.
There is a mystic flame about the Cross.
I do not weep, I neither pray nor moan,—
I, who bade Judas send Thee to Thy death.

My swift remorse has passed into a peace
Beyond mine understanding. . . . In Thine eyes,
That rested on the whole world as they closed,
I read the look that knew and pardoned all.
O Jesus, Lover of my soul,—I faint
From some sheer happiness that trembles through
My spirit like strange music ! I am free !
My life, love-wrecked and broken, is made whole.
The shackles that I bound about myself
No more are heavy. See ! I rise and kiss
Thy holy feet this once, in holiness.
Thy kingdom is my kingdom. As a child

MARY MAGDALEN

That does a parent's bidding, I will do
As Thou hast taught on earth ; and if I dwell
With Thee for ever in Thy Father's house—
I shall not find eternity too long.

Lo, I have drained the cup ! I am the Bride !
Lo, I have purged the Temple as with fire !
With pleasure I have mortified the flesh ;
And pride has scourged my soul. . . . And now
I go
Forth from the Presence of the Crucified,
To wear the heavy raiment of the blest.
I shall put on the robe of sacrifice,
And wrap me in the veil of chastity.
My faith shall be the band about my brow,
And poverty the sandals on my feet.
My drink shall be the water from the well
Of sorrow, and my bread humility ;
And Love shall be my staff, when in His name,

MARY MAGDALEN

I wander on a mission, long and sweet,—
Sheltered from sun and heat or wind and cold
For ever by the Shadow of the Cross,
Whereon I saw my Bridegroom die for me.

SAPPHO TO A SWALLOW ON THE GROUND

For Sara Teasdale

WHAT wakes the tender grasses where I lie?
What small soft presence stirs and startles by?

 Swallow, O swallow,

Why have you left the tree-tops and the sky?

The grass is faded by the sun and rain,

The Summer passes, Autumn comes again,

 Swallow, O swallow,

And, bitter-sweet, love trembles into pain.

The heart of earth grows weary, and her eyes
Are closed ; her lips are tuned to languid sighs,

 Swallow, O swallow,

And in my heart the singing sobs and dies. . . .

SAPPHO TO A SWALLOW

Night-long, by blown seas, musical with wind,
I flutter like a lost child, weak and blind,

 Swallow, O swallow,

After the mother whom she cannot find. . . .

Through apple-boughs the murmurous breezes
sing,

As waters from a cool deep-shaded spring,

 Swallow, O swallow,

And slumber streams from leaves left quivering.

Have you grown weary of the heaven's height,
The hidden stars, the vivid depths of light,

 Swallow, O swallow,

As love grows weary of the long swift flight ?

You do not answer but your wings are spread,
And past the topmost apple, sweet and red,

 Swallow, O swallow,

In flight and song you vanish overhead !

SAPPHO TO A SWALLOW

I, too, will give my heart unto the heaven ;
Phaon shall find me through the dusk of ev'n,
 Swallow, O swallow,
Shaken with kisses ere they have been given !

As from the swarming hive in nuptial flight
The queen ascends, all golden fire and light,
 Swallow, O swallow,
On wings of ecstasy I rise to-night !

But to the earth my flight shall not return,
For when the sun-like flame has ceased to burn,
 Swallow, O swallow,—
The Lesbian Sea shall be my funeral urn.

“THIS IS MY HOUR”

For Countess V—

I

THE ferries ply like shuttles in a loom,
And many barques come in across the bay
To lights and bells that signal through the gloom
Of twilight grey ;

And like the brown soft flutter of the snow
The wide-winged sea-birds droop from closing
skies,
And hover near the water, circling low,
As the day dies.

The city like a shadowed castle stands,
Its turrets indistinctly touching night ;

“THIS IS MY HOUR”

Like earth-born stars far fetched from faerie lands,
Its lamps are bright.

This is my hour,—when wonder springs anew
To see the towers ascending, pale and high,
And the long seaward distances of blue,
And the dim sky.

II

This is my hour, between the day and night ;
The sun has set and all the world is still,
The afterglow upon the distant hill
Is as a holy light.

This is my hour, between the sun and moon ;
The little stars are gathering in the sky,
There is no sound but one bird's startled cry,—
One note that ceases soon.

“THIS IS MY HOUR”

The gardens and, far off, the meadow-land,
Are like the fading depths beneath a sea,
While over waves of misty shadows we
Drift onward, hand in hand.

This is my hour, that you have called your own ;
Its hushéd beauty silently we share,—
Touched by the wistful wonder in the air
That leaves us so alone.

III

In rain and twilight mist the city street,
Hushed and half-hidden, might this instant be
A dark canal beneath our balcony,
Like one in Venice, Sweet.

The street-lights blossom, star-wise, one by one ;
A lofty tower the shadows have not hid
Stands out—part column and part pyramid—
Holy to look upon.

“THIS IS MY HOUR”

The dusk grows deeper, and on silver wings
The twilight flutters like a weary gull
Toward some sea-island, lost and beautiful,
Where a sea-syren sings.

“ This is my hour,” you breathe with quiet lips ;
And filled with beauty, dreaming and devout,
We sit in silence, while our thoughts go out—
Like treasure-seeking ships.

THE COMEDIENNE

“MINE OWN VINEYARD HAVE I NOT KEPT”

For Henrietta Crosman

SHE passed our vineyard through one winter day,

And with her magic laughter summoned
Spring;

Whereat a thousand birds began to sing,
And starry flowers sprang to light her way;
And now where once she paused to smile and
stay

A little while, the Autumn comes to bring
The days of festival and harvesting,—
The winepress waits for dancing feet at play.

But in the vineyard that she calls her own
No purple grapes hang heavy on the vine,

THE COMEDIENNE

No laughter lingers on her listless lips,—
She stands within a mist, far off, alone,—
No maidens sing to tread the dripping wine,
And from her hand a faded garland slips.

THE TRAGEDIENNE

UPON a hill in Thessaly

Stand broken columns in a line

About a cold forgotten shrine

Beneath a moon in Thessaly. . . .

A storm is riding on the tide,

Grey is the day, and grey the sky,

Far off the seagulls wheel and cry,—

A storm draws near upon the tide. . . .

A city lifts its minarets

To winds that from the desert sweep,

And prisoned Arab women weep

Below the domes and minarets. . . .

But in the world there is no place

So desolate as your tragic face.

THE PERFECT VOICE

For Julia Marlowe

HER voice is lovely as a fabled lyre,
And sweet as winds that sing the sea to
sleep,
And soft as mermaids sighing, fathoms deep,
And splendid as the singing of a choir,
Glad and melodious as any bird—
A-thrill in song in a leafy tree-top steep,
And memorable as things that make us weep,
As strong as armies when the foe is heard !

Pure music falls and rises in its sound ;
It thrills with changing moods,—the Herd-girl's
grief,
Viola's mirth, or Juliet's despair ;

THE PERFECT VOICE

Deep silence and a stillness fall around
Its golden tone,—as when a rustling leaf
Sends sound and silence through the startled
air.

THE PRINCESS DANCES

For J. M.

SALOME dances on the grass ;
At last her hour is come to pass.

Now, rainbow-hued, her seven veils
Are flung about her, seven gales
That flutter to her body's grace
Or mist-like rise before her face ;
Before her deep mysterious eyes
Soft clouds of veil, concealing, rise—
Then like a shower of leaves, wind-blown,
Or a flock of little birds, half-grown,
Uncertainly drift down to lie
Just where her feet, anon, dance by. . . .

THE PRINCESS DANCES

She lifts her arms above her head,
Her lips part—though their mirth is dead ;
Her slow swift sudden movements seem
Caught in the languor of a dream ;
Her eyes half close as if their gaze
Found through the Tetrarch's clamorous praise
The cool unwilling lips of John
Descending close, her mouth upon.

Her breath sings faintly through the cry
Of music, that with moan and sigh
And reeling joy runs through the night
And lifts its voice against the light
Of moon and stars that gleam above
The girl who sways with hate and love,
And throw a holy glory there—
Upon the blood-stained terrace where
Salome dances on the grass,
Knowing her hour is come to pass.

THE PRINCE OF DENMARK

For Edward Hugh Sothern

IN that brief instant when the Prince was king,
And in his hand his father's sceptre shone,
The pathos of a devastated throne
Left me dim-eyed and sad and quivering.

No more the vast, Shakspearean pomp of Death
Found me with unbowed head, hushed and
elate
With splendid, tearless pleasure o'er a fate
So nobly sinking with a ceasing breath

The Prince was king; the king was dead; the cries
Were hushed ; the guns were fired ; the soldiers
bore
Hamlet aloft upon their shields ; his line

THE PRINCE OF DENMARK

Had ended ; and the curtain fell . . . One tries
To call me back with laughter . . . and I pour
My wine, and laugh—and laugh—and drink
my wine.

A CHILD'S SHAKESPERE

I

AS YOU LIKE IT

I WAS a child, and my green Shakespere took
 Into a meadow, underneath a tree
 Where oft' I went to read, and eagerly—
With trembling fingers—opened my new book. . . .
I liked the pages and their broken look
 Of measured lines. . . . Then people talked
 to me,
 And to each other,—and I seemed to see
A girl who sighed and held a shepherd's crook ;

—
And then I heard poor Celia, who was tired,
 Say—"I can go no farther" ; and I felt

A CHILD'S SHAKESPERE

I too had walked with them until I could
No farther go. . . . Orlando's verses fired
My heart with such swift sympathy I knelt
And prayed that things might happen as they
should.

II

ROMEO AND JULIET

A river through our meadow rushed and sang ;—
I knew that it was going to the sea ;
So when she leaned out from her balcony
To talk to Romeo, a sudden pang
Went through my heart,—for while I watched
him hang
Within a swaying, moon-lit, leafy tree—
I knew that they were rushing to the sea,
With smiles and tears, and words that thrilled
and rang !

A CHILD'S SHAKESPERE

I saw her bend above him with soft grace,
I saw him swing himself up by a bough,
And it was dark and sweet and still, while
she
Said low;—“To follow thee—” and kissed his
face—
“My lord, throughout the world!” She
trembled now—
I trembled too, remembering the sea !

II

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

“Of many thousand kisses the poor last”;
Thus, dying, spake the Roman to the Queen—
She whose undreamed-of face mine eyes had
seen
In her pavilion as it floated past.

A CHILD'S SHAKESPERE

“Of many thousand kisses the poor last” ;
The Royal Empress took his hands between
Her hands ; I saw her tears, and saw her
lean
Over his face . . . and felt the silence vast.

The death-pale splendid queen, in white and gold
And purple, spake with sombre majesty,—
The Eastern Star sang low against the sky ;
“As soft as air, as sweet as balm,”—words tolled
Like mystic bells ; “What, should I stay ? ”
said she—
And with wide eyes I saw great Egypt die.

CALYPSO

I

YOUR eyes were splendid when you watched the
flight

Of that far sea-bird vanish down the wind
Into the distances of sea and sky.

Odysseus,—then you dreamed of Ithaca !
You dreamed of singing armies sailing home,
And bearing in their hands the victory
That left in flames the hostile heights of Troy.
Ah, Sea-bird, out of death you came to me ;
Your wings were weary then of waves and wind,
When Zeus with lightning burned your homing
ships,

And out of closing eyes you looked at death ;
But through the stormy night, across the depths,

CALYPSO

You heard me singing to the angry clouds ;
With sudden strength you braved the tide to me,
For seven years, night-long, I have not sung
From coral cliff or star-lit saffron shore. . . .
Odysseus,—do not dream of Ithaca !
Odysseus, see,—my hair is long and dark ;
You called it midnight round the moon, my face.
And see,—my body is more white than foam ;
Like foam, you said, I floated on the wave
That swept your soul out to eternal seas.
Then shall I sing again to mariners,
Who fall upon their knees before my face,
And tremble at my voice, and sob of love ?

II

He sleeps, and I am weary now of song,
And weary of the pallid flowers I sought
Beneath the swaying depths of moon-stirred tides ;

CALYPSO

And I am weary of all other things
Except the silent face beneath mine eyes,
The hands I touch, the body warm with sleep.
As through a heavy mist on groping wings
A white bird flutters, and is lost again,
There hovered on his lips a distant name
That shook his breath,—and vanished in his
dreams. . . .

Oceanus, my father, by the love
That brought my mother Thetis to your arms,
I pray you build a wall of waves and wind,
So from this isle no barque may ever sail !

Disturb the depths and hurl the waters high
And with a tempest lash the tortured sea
Until it writhes and leaps, and lines of foam
Are left against the sky like drifting clouds !

And Thetis, O my mother,—bear to Zeus
The prayer that beats against my frightened
heart

CALYPSO

That He may hush the call of Ithaca
That draws Odysseus o'er the wine-dark sea
And in his dreams for ever leads him home.
Ah, blithe and lovely Thetis, whose white feet
Speed o'er the waves as flowers blown through
foam,—

Are you the mother from whose breast I lived,
The laughing, kissing mother whom I loved
Before you gave me to this wooded isle ?
You bore a son, Achilles, to a king,
And me you bore, a daughter to a god,
And love has fallen on you as the sun
Falls burningly upon a waving flower ;
Your beauty does not wither to the wind,
But toward the sun you lift your face and
smile.

Did ever light and heat descend on you
As love has fallen heavily on me ?
Oh, lift my heart within your shining arms

CALYPSO

And put to sleep the longing and the dread,
And put to sleep the waking hours of tears !

III

The long night severs as two purple wings
From the bright body of a bird unfold.

The time has come, Odysseus, when the sea
Again must take you to its barren breast.

The gods have heard the prayer you made in
dreams,

And from mine arms your restless soul is free
To seek again the way to Ithaca ;

But driving winds and seas that hide in mists,
And perilous rocks, and storms, and hostile shores
Shall threaten ere you see Penelope,—

An unremembered strange Penelope,
A woman who has waited and has wept,
And is no more the bride you bade good-bye ;

CALYPSO

But Zeus ordains your homing destiny
And moves your heart with pity for her faith. . . .
Your hands still linger in my falling hair,
And with the sting of kisses over-sweet
Between our lips our last kiss dies . . . and now
I bring you parting gifts, and say farewell,
And bid you go—remembering my face.

CIRCE

I bow my head before your hate,

Mariner, mariner !

You heard my songs and chose your fate,

What time you whispered at my gate,

O changéd mariner !

I answer not your new despair,

Mariner, mariner ;

You saw my face and called me fair,

You caught and kissed my curling hair,

O changéd mariner !

Your mouth is mute, but let me speak,

Mariner, mariner !

You took my hand and found me meek,

Your arms were strong when mine were weak,

O changéd mariner !

CIRCE

I hear your curses on my land,

Mariner, mariner,—

Do you forget how, hand in hand,

We saw the stars above the sand,

O changéd mariner ?

I hear your angry plea to Jove,

Mariner, mariner,

Too oft' the mouth you weary of

You kissed with humble pleas for love,

O changéd mariner !

My sorrow lurks within mine eyes,

Mariner, mariner ;

You leave me when the summer flies ;

For me love flames and fades and dies,

O changéd mariner !

CIRCE

Then lift again your dripping oar,

Mariner, mariner !

For vanished love returns no more

Unto my sad enchanted shore,—

O changéd mariner !

ODE ON BEAUTY

Now driven by restless energy for song
I touched the lyre with eager trembling hands ;
Not to a sylvan goddess held among
The golden hierarchy of dim lands
Do I lift up mine eyes, and call to bless
With inspiration my too humble praise
By being vivid in her loveliness ;
Nor do I seek among the ruinous ways
And desolation of forgotten realms
For some immortal fragment of the past,—

Perchance

A hero's storied lance ;

Or for a shining ensign borne above the helms
Of galleys that once warred for empires vast,
A standard that in fancy gleams again,

ODE ON BEAUTY

The splendid symbol of a splendid strife
Upon the wine-dark main,—
And, gleaming, casts its shadow down upon
The bended head of her who was the wife
Of Spartan Menelaus, but anon
Will lift o'er Ilium her ~~head~~ that lies
Now listlessly across her dreaming eyes.

Of no heroic days these numbers are,
Nor goddess worshipped in her sacred grove ;
There is a Spirit ruling from afar
Who hath created Song and Dreams and Love ;
Who, when the world was only night and space
Across the darkness scattered stars to sing ;
Who, when the world was but a sleeping place
Awakened it unto the sweet first Spring ;
Then were the depths melodious with seas,
And all the lands that rose above their flood
Were gladdened by the green of grass and trees,—

ODE ON BEAUTY

And over all a sun that stained like blood
The dewy mists that veiled the tremulous dawn ;
And through the fresh fair forest ways there
moved

Perchance a startled fawn
Quick followed by a fleeting maid—
Who being seen was loved

By one whose eyes had made her all afraid !

It is of Beauty that I fain would sing,
And she did lend me from her voice a note
That I such praises as are meet might bring
To her who knoweth each bird's warbling throat !
She is the unseen presence in a song,
The grace within each flower's slender stem,
The lily that is white, the rose of wrong,
The fire and fever in each gleaming gem ;
And every murmurous wind repeats her name,
And it is chanted by the waves that roll,

ODE ON BEAUTY

It is her breath that fans the Autumn's flame
In leaves whose crimson death eludes the gloom ;
And love of Beauty is the soul,—
That fragment of a life untouched by doom,
The yearning to create, to never die,
The high, divine, eternal cry
Aspiring from the changing sod,—
The common attribute of man and god !

A PROFILE

For Miss E—

I saw one pass along a marble frieze
That Time had shaken from a temple wall ;
And moving maidens in processional
Followed or came before, but none of these
Turned such a face from the Hesperides,
Or stood, superb, like Greece before her fall,
Or went so proudly in the festival,—
Whither,—O goddess of the fallen frieze ?

No garlands for the gods delight your hands,
No sacred fillets round your brow are pressed,
But you emerge from some forgotten gloom,—
Lonely in beauty like your twilight lands,
And lovelier than Helen when she blessed
An ancient city with a splendid doom.

ONE WOMAN

SINCE I had heard them speak of her great shame
I looked upon her face with curious eyes,
But pity in my heart became surprise,—
Finding not any havoc there, nor flame ;
Only a little smile that went and came,
As if she knew a mirth too great and wise
And far too proud to serve the world with lies,
Disdaining as she did its praise or blame.

She who had passed through sin, as through a door,
Stayed not upon the steps to wail and beat
Against the portal closed for evermore ;
But smiled, and went her way with tireless
feet,
When night had passed and the long day
begun ;—
So Hagar faced the desert with her son.

LOTUS-FLOWER

OH, cold and blue upon an ancient stream,
Your beauty is a deathless lotus-flower,
Shaped like a star, and coloured like the hour
Of desert twilight, when the shadows seem
To dim the Sphinx ; strange and eternal gleam
The eyes that draw my soul with sombre power,
Back into tombs where haunting memories cower,
And life is as an echo and a dream.

Dear ghost of Egypt, lift your face again—
Illumined faintly as by distant fire,—
Perchance these hands have scourged a thou-
sand slaves !

Did I, too, shudder at your chill disdain ?
Or were we twin-born with a king for sire,
And has our love outlived a thousand graves ?

TO A FRIEND

LIKE yellow flowers enriching with their gold
The treasure-house, that is the World in Spring,
Are all the tender thoughts of you that bring
Their gladness to make richer, many-fold,
My heart—which is the world a-bloom of old
With youth to live and songs to hear and sing ;
Into this treasure-house, Ninon, you fling
One flower that will not fade when Spring is cold.

How can I thank you for the gold that gleams
Across my April days of shower and sun ?

How can I thank you for your gifts to me ?—
For gentleness, and mirth, and faith, and dreams,
And fairer than all fair fresh flowers, this
one,—

This fragrant fadeless flower of sympathy.

IN MEMORY OF SWINBURNE

THEY have not laid thee, Singer, in a tomb
In Abbey walls,
But where thou liest is there deeper gloom
When night-time falls

Than shadows o'er the graves of those who sleep
Together there,—
Above whose names have nations paused to weep,
And to despair ?

And yet for thee who loved the sea and land,
And heaven above,
They make thy grave where thine own music
planned,
Singer of love.

IN MEMORY OF SWINBURNE

Where Death hath taken thee, no man may know,
But if thou art
Where any arrow from a careless bow
May pierce thine heart,

~~Dost~~ now a nation's blind ingratitude
To her great dead,
Make wistful, childish-wise, thy quiet mood,
And bend thine head ?

Not all of England's armies, nor her ships,
Could leave, as thou,
Her language on a million singing lips,
Alien till now ;

And that the land that bore thee leaves unsaid
Praise for thy name,
And does not lay the laurel o'er thee, dead,
Is thy land's shame.

IN MEMORY OF SWINBURNE

But, Singer, of thy brothers whom she gave
Her honours, all
Would leave their tombs to share thy grass-grown
grave,
As thou didst call.

All poets love thee, and all lovers too,
And all youth-time ;
So, where thou sleepest 'neath the stars and dew,
I leave my rhyme,—

And say thee thanks for music that hath taken
My soul o'ersea,
To Lesbos, and the Holy Lands forsaken
By all save thee.

THE DEAD AVIATOR

For A. H.

IT was a sea uncharted that you sailed,
Oh, Mariner, borne by your wingéd barque
Beyond far ports, where winds like sirens wailed,
Past the flight of the lark.

It was a field of sunlight and of air,
Oh, Rider, that your magic steed roamed over,—
Where clouds were left like dust along the glare,
And the stars were like clover.

It was a land of nothingness and space,
Where, Conqueror, you entered and unfurled
An earthly ensign in a pathless place
Beyond the certain world.

THE DEAD AVIATOR

It was a stairway that the foot of Man
Had never through the ages long ascended,—
But toward the sun, oh, Child, you laughed and
ran,
Until your playtime ended.

It was a tryst you went unto, oh, Lover!—
With Death, your Bride,—who prays you fare no
more
From her small house . . . and gives you grass
for cover . . .
And bars a silent door.

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

THIS is the cruellest of cruel things,—
That I, the daughter of a line of kings,
Should humbly love a passing minstrel bold ;
Nor fair is he, nor young, but strangely old,
With weary lips that only curve in song,
(Ah ! heaven, how his weary arms are strong !)
And eyes so ardent that they have no place
Within the coldness of his thin white face.

Oh, did his songs, or did his glowing eyes
Call to my heart beneath the music's sighs
The night he came into my father's hall
With vagrant jests and careless rhymes for all ?
I have remembered since that eagerly
His passing gaze most often paused at me ;

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

“ And surely,” said I, to my troubled heart,
“ He is grotesque as now he stands apart
With hungry arms, and hungry cruel face”—
I turned to smile upon a courtier’s grace ;
But all the world had vanished from my sight.
I saw two eyes, mysterious, alight !
What unknown fires burned there ? What joy or
 pain ?
I looked upon the minstrel’s face again.
Now faster, wilder, grew the revelry !
But all my mirth was dead, for close to me
He drew . . . he heard my breath come pain-
 fully,
He knew I pitied him,—alas, he knew !
And laughed aloud as some strange god might
 do.

My hair by knights has oft’ been called pure
gold,

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

The ballad-makers have my beauty told,
My tiring-maids have ever stood aside
And wondered when my hair hung loose, untied,
While I, with no more covering than it,
Have blushed because they thought me exquisite.

He laughed, *at me*, as some strange god might do,
And from the hall in trembling haste I flew,—
But not before I heard his laughter cease,
And strange and sudden tears had brought me
peace.

Was I the princess of the courtiers' praise ?
Was I the girl whose feet trod gracious ways ?
Within a mirror, silver through the gloom,
I sought myself, there kneeling in my room.

That night I wept who never wept before. . . .
Anon I heard the minstrel by my door ;
I was a princess, surely came he then
A suppliant, who was no king of men.

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

My thought was gentle ; I would let him bow
And for his boldness ask forgiveness now . . .
His eyes were ardent on me with their sin—
His hungry arms about me swept me in—
(I know the moon was like a splendid song
That ran the casements of the night along,
While stars made their appointed music sweet
And winds and shadows swooned about our feet !)
And thrice, with fear and joy and passing pride,
I would have fallen fainting by his side
But that my heart was strong and glad with love,
And fierce with all the tenderness thereof ;
Mine eyes beheld the bitter way Love's feet
Must follow, and the poisoned wine and sweet ;
I took the bitter way ; I drained the wine :
And in that hour I found a gift divine,—
His weariness and love and songs were mine !
That he had brought no gifts of power and place,
Or royal dignities of pride and race,

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

But made more sweet my pity of his days
When on the road he sang his minstrel lays,
And cared not whether fortune led him on
Through night beneath the moon, through days of
sun.

He lingers here within my father's house
And leads the court in laughter and carouse ;
My women jest with him, but smiling hide
Their secret joy to keep him by their side.
I, who am jealous of this dalliance,
Alone may never call him with my glance.
Oh, that my head, so bowed in love and pain,
Might lift itself in fearless pride again !

My maids no more have wondering eyes to see
My fairness, and I feel that pityingly
They have surmised what fever makes me faint
And burns upon my face like wantons' paint ;

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

I heard one say, "'Tis surely that brave knight
Come to the tourney wearing gold and white,
Whose beauty sickens her with secret love,
For she is strange and timid as a dove
And would not seek his preference though she
die,—

And no knight dares to lift his eyes so high."
Well,— let them think this thing, for what
care I ?

And let my sin consume me, day by day,
Until I fall where I was wont to pray,
Before the shining crucifix I shun,
Before the tortured face of Mary's Son !

A prince is coming from a distant place,
And he is fairly famed for skill and grace ;
'Tis said that many women love his face.
He comes to claim me as his queen and bride ;
My father pledged my troth to him with pride.

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

Another moon will come and pass away
Before the dawning of the wedding-day,
Before the hour when I shall kiss the book,
And touch the sceptre that my fathers took.
And make the vows, and wear the bridal
gown,
And bow my head beneath the gleaming crown,
And hear the clinging music of the lyre,
The joyous singing of the maiden choir,
And see the bridegroom's face through mists of
veil ;
Before the day when many boats will sail
To bear these tidings into far-off ports,
Before the merriment of feasts and sports,
Before the marriage-eve will bring to pass
A band of maidens dancing on the grass. . . .

Then am I jealous that a minstrel stays
To please my women with his mocking praise ?

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

How often has he called me more than fair !
And looked long in mine eyes, and kissed my
hair,
And kissed my throat, and bidden me to dance,—
Then as I circled caught me close, perchance !

I well have loved the purple and the crown ;
I cannot throw my toy of greatness down ;
I cannot follow him for love of whom
I have held out mine hands to sin and doom.

There is a dagger hidden in my breast ;
There is a death-draught in the ancient crest
Upon the ring I wear. . . . There is a stream. . . .
Besides its gliding darkness oft' I dream ;
There is a sickening fear in every pain ;
A faintness and a fever and a pain ;
There is a madness ever in my brain !
Oh, is this love so great that I must die—
Spent—like a weakling bird that seeks the sky ?

EMPIRE D'AMOUR

I touch the dagger . . . tremble at a sound !
Think of his songs . . . and turn the ring
around. . . .

I am the daughter of a line of kings,—
This is the cruellest of cruel things.

SONG FOR THE BELOVED

COME closer, my maidens, I sway on my knees ;

Oh, dark over me is the shadow of love !

This veil is a shroud for the winding of joy ;

Oh, maidens, my heart was a dove

That trembled, that fell, that is dead of its
fear,—

A storm over me is the coming of love !

Come closer, my maidens, the hour that is nigh

Is cruel, is close, is the winter a-cold

That creeps like a thief toward the summer's
warm hands,

To steal all the flowers they hold ;

I tremble, I swoon, for the hour that is nigh

Is cruel, is close, and my heart is a-cold !

SONG FOR THE BELOVED

Come closer, my maidens, the face that I fear
Is famished, is flushed, is the fire to the flower !
My years are yet few, and my songs are not
sung ;
Oh, father, the bride whom you dower
So richly to honour this marriage you make
Will die ere the fragrance has died from this
flower !

THE KING'S KISS

FROM Uwaine's realm she came to serve
At court in Hoel's land ;
No maid so fair in Brittany
E'er knelt and kissed his hand ;
The Fool who saw the King's eyes flame
Shuddered to understand.

Her eyes she lifted to the King,
And—startled—grew afraid,
As if she felt upon her heart
Some heavy joy were laid ;
A sudden gladness left her weak,
A little prayer she made ;

She did not know it was a prayer,—
The sob her breath drew in ;

THE KING'S KISS

“ Beware his kiss, what can it mean
 But fear and shame and sin ?
Beware his kiss, 'tis woe and death ! ”
Thus soft sang Gawdelin.

She heard the song the good Fool sang :
 The King, he too had heard,
And something in his soul awoke
 To flutter like a bird ;
He took her hands between his hands,
 But neither spoke a word. . . .

The summer sun that lately shone
 Above the garden there,
Descended 'mid the far-off hills
 And shadows ventured where
The day still lingered in the warmth
 And sunlight of her hair.

THE KING'S KISS

Came darkness soft, and peace, until
The deep unknown unrest
That stirred her heart was echoed from
The song the night loves best,—
The nightingale's flame song that burns
Strange wounds in every breast.

Anon the King's arms held her close,
Their lips met, ardent, then ;
Anon the King's arms held her off
A little way, as when
He looked at her as though she were
The one maid left to men. . . .

The Fool stole forth and late it was ;
The revels screamed within.
“ Beware his kiss, what can it mean
But shame and fear and sin ?
Beware his kiss, 'tis woe and death ! ”
Again sang Gawdelin.

THE KING'S KISS

The Fool's lips lingered to his flute,
And prayed in melody ;
It was a tender tune he made,
As piteous as could be,—
Then sad, anon, he stole away,
Unnoticed, silently.

And when again the Fool had gone
The King put love aside ;
Compassionate, he turned from her,
Whose heart had vanquished pride ;
With many tears and broken words,
“Stay—Sire, oh, stay !” she cried.

In love and sorrow Hoel turned ;
He knew not what to say ;
But as he fled from her sweet voice
He knew his heart would stay
Behind him in the darkness where
She, swooning, fell and lay. . . .

THE KING'S KISS

At last her grief called out to her;
She woke to memory,
To weep in humble loneliness;
“Despite his care for me
I would I were a light-o'-love,—
I would I were!” sobbed she.

Long Hoel lived, and fought, and smiled;
None knew his secret pain,
Except the Fool who played to him
Sweet music, soft like rain;
And in a convent 'mid the hills
The maiden prayed, in vain.

THE QUEEN'S JESTER

OH, I am weary of the fool's light place !
I am a-weary of the songs I sing !
I am a-weary of the flowers I bring !
And I am weary of your smile's sweet grace ;
 Of all these things I am a-weary now,
Yea, sick of all, as once again I bow
My capped shorn head before your starlike face.

Oh Beauty, when your fingers lightly touch
 My painted cheek in payment for my mirth
The heart beneath my motley leaves the earth
And singing, reels—a drunken thing—to such
 Wild heavens, my Queen, as you know nothing
 of—

You do not know because you know not love
(Yet have I watched your eyes a-dreaming much).

THE QUEEN'S JESTER

Dream, dream, sweet Queen, upon your purple
throne,—

Your days of power over me are few ;

Ere long your distant dreams are coming true

On songs of mine from which all mirth has flown ;

These mocking lips whose jests you found so
droll

Shall search upon your mouth and find your
soul,—

And drink it up to mingle with mine own !

Adored, so dream I from my fool's light place,

And pity you who sometimes pity me,

(I have surprised your eyes fixed pityingly !)

But I am weary of your smile's sweet grace ;

Forgive !—because my love so restless is

To vanquish, Queen, your glory in a kiss,

And lay love's face upon your starlike face.

I AM THE WIND

I AM the wind that wavers,
 You are the certain land ;
I am the shadow that passes
 Over the sand.

I am the leaf that quivers,
 You—the unshaken tree ;
You are the stars that are steadfast,
 I am the sea.

You are the light eternal,
 Like a torch I shall die. . . .
You are the surge of deep music,
 I—but a cry !

TO A FAIR WOMAN

HELEN, by many loved, and loving not,
Helen, whose smiles are ever cold and sweet,
Art thou an ancient queen whom Time forgot,
And Death paused not to greet?

Helen, perchance thy perfect beauty came,
An heritage to make the world more fair,
From one who lived in Troy, and bore thy name,
And had such red-gold hair.

Thine eyes are like deep sea-water at night,
Thy mouth is as a flower that fears the sun,—
Burned pale once long ago by too great light,
Its singing all is done.

TO A FAIR WOMAN

Immortal as the marble maids of Greece
Thou goest on thy gracious way apart,
Thy lifted face for ever still with peace,—
Helen, without a heart.

And yet more fragile than an earth-born rose,
More fleeting and more fair and sweet than such,
Thou seemest when thy weary eyelids close,—
Helen, loved overmuch.

ODE ON ANOTHER'S HAPPINESS

Oh, Girl, whom I beheld so radiant-eyed
Beside the proud glad man who bent his head
Over your voice, to hear each word you said,
 To you, a new betrothèd bride,
A day and night my thoughts have backward
fled ;
For I, who caught upon a city street,
The heaven in two faces flashing by,
Dreamed on the instant of a starlit sky,
 And of a garden sweet,
Where a fountain near a balcony
Sang like the music of a serenade
As through the parting curtains came
One whose rapture was a flame,—
“ The light that never was on land or sea.”

ODE ON ANOTHER'S HAPPINESS

The look of Juliet was on your face,

 But oh, it was her very grace,

Thrown over you like some transcending veil

That made your beauty mystic as a dream

Of all fair loves that are, and that have been,

And still shall be, when you lie cold and pale

 In a garden where white poppies gleam,

And lips no more may kisses lose or win.

For you the cup runs over, and for you

Love shapes a vista of unlived sweet years

 To wander, dreaming, through ;

And thoughts of little children bring no fears,

But the proud joy that you may live again

 In lives sprung from your own,

Drawing your souls with holiness and pain

 And the first moan,

Into a dearer kinship than you yet have known ;

For you the sun is but a glory shed

From that which burns too brightly in your breast ;

ODE ON ANOTHER'S HAPPINESS

And you are drunken with the gladdest wine
 Ever from an immortal vine
The winged feet of men and maids have pressed,
 From purple fruit and red.

Oh, lovers of the crowded street, you pass,
Thinking the world, in pretty arrogance,
Blooms with no other such divine romance,—
But other stars have fallen on the grass !
And I who loved you gladly for love's sake,
Give you a little pity from my heart,
 (Which you will scorn to take !)
For new and thrilling as may be your joy
It cannot be so rich as mine own part.
Nor can it be the same deep draught I drain,
 Oh, my Sweet Boy,—
 With closéd eyes and happy pain,
When taken in your sudden swift embrace,—
 Your kiss falls on my face !

PIERROT AND THE PARASOL

SILKEN and mauve upon a golden stem,
Her parasol is like a passion-flower,—
Fallen forgotten from her hands that hour
My soul was startled by the sight of them.

Now she is gone, but her too sweet perfume,
Like poisonous wine from pallid violets pressed,
Lingers and leaves my jesting lips distressed—
As though her shadow fluttered through the
gloom.

Oh, wan and fair is she, my pale strange flower !
A dear drear angel from a nether heaven,
Where Time is not at all, and endless even
Pauses and passes not with any hour ;

PIERROT AND THE PARASOL

From that sad shore, untrod by loveless feet,
An ominous wind has blown my asphodel,—
A star too fair, a blossom loved too well,
Is she whose touch most subtle is, and sweet. . . .

Now on her folded parasol I stare,
(Made fragrant with the faint perfume of her,)
With dreaming eyes, and memories that stir
Like winds a-tremble in her wild dark hair ;

So like her is this mauve and golden thing !
So like a hushéd lute my lips might sound,—
A chalice where her sea-deep soul lies drowned,—
So like a passion-flower, withering !

BAL MASQUE

ONE thought comes now more mad than all the rest.

My satin slippers left where I undressed
Bid me to put them on and steal away
To seek some grotesque mirth before the day ;

And my long cape that lies across the bed,
Where in disorder furs and gowns are spread,
Implores my soul to some absurd romance,—
Why not the masquerade where still they dance ?

For I might make my muff into a mask,
And change into a coach my absinthe flask,
And bid the stars that stand so idly by
Bring me a robe of mist and moon-lit sky ;

BAL MASQUE

And I might charge the genii of the rouge
To make my face flower-like for lovers' use,
And with these five dead roses for a fan
Enter the ballroom as the last tired dance
began. . . .

And I should dance the last tired dance with
him,
Until the music failed, and lights grew dim,
And the slow morning peering through the door
Saw us glide by alone upon the floor. . . .

Lo, la la . . . lo, la la . . . lo-oo, la la—!

The waltz is over, but my lover lays
His arms about me still . . . no music plays . . .
My fan has fallen—and I droop for breath—
He lifts his mask—*Hélas!* I danced with
Death.

VILLANELLE OF CITY AND COUNTRY

BENEATH the arches of the leaves I lie,
And watch the Lovers wander—Song and
Spring—
But oh, the towers set in Gotham's sky !

A great triangle shaft uplifts on high
Its columned shrine wherein the presses sing ;
Beneath the arches of the leaves I lie.

With flocks of clouds the Shepherd-wind goes by,
White poppies 'mid the waving grasses swing—
But oh, the towers set in Gotham's sky !

As to a fairy castle we draw nigh
When home the ferries bear us, marvelling ;
Beneath the arches of the leaves I lie.

VILLANELLE OF CITY, ETC.

Across the empty fields the trumpets die
That meadow-larks unto the morning fling—
But oh, the towers set in Gotham's sky !

Far off I hear the city's aching cry,
Where Life and Death are Lovers, wander-
ing ;
Beneath the arches of the leaves I lie,—
But oh, the towers set in Gotham's sky !

VILLANELLE OF MEMORY

IN my heart a little pain
Grows into a soft-breathed sigh
As I touch your hand again.

Eyes seek eyes for joy in vain,
But my lips with smiles defy
In my heart a little pain.

On your mouth, of pity fain,
Jests, a little bitter, die
As I touch your hand again ;

And the hope we thought was slain
Wakens with a clinging cry
In my heart a little pain.

VILLANELLE OF MEMORY

I can hear a phantom strain
 Of our buried love draw nigh
As I touch your hand again.

Time, my dear, has made us sane ;
 Yet there lingers,—who knows why ?
In my heart a little pain
 As I touch your hand again.

WHERE JOY PASSED BY

For Marie

HERE is the spot where Joy passed by,
And never smiled at me ;
I lingered near the hillside road
And waited, tremblingly.

My heart was all a-thrill with hope. . . .
His coming seemed so long
That, half-afraid, I sang aloud
To lose my fear in song.

Oh, when at last I saw his face
It was as if the sun
Had shed a glory on the world
Before the night was done !

WHERE JOY PASSED BY

Because I could not speak or see,
Because from other lands
I thought that Joy had come to me
I held out both my hands ;

And sheer delight within my heart
Sang pæans, silently—
He came so close—but on he passed !
And did not smile at me.

Oh, when I knew that he had gone
The world grew dark again,
And weary, then, and old was I,
Who waited there in vain. . . .

I wonder if his kiss had been
As sweet as my long pain.

ASK ME NO MORE

Ask me no more ; it is enough
To lie within your arms again,—
Broken with too much love,
And too much pain.

Ask me no more ; do I forget—?
Not one of all our kisses shed
Like flower-leaves, dewy-wet,
Over the dead.

Has life seemed overlong to me ?
Ay, even nights with roses decked
Were as a lonely sea,
And I, shipwrecked ;

ASK ME NO MORE

But now the tide has swept me in ;—

Too tired and glad I touch the shore

To say where I have been—

Ask me no more.

IMPROVISATION

"They told us that a girl was dead."—"Musette's Story."

ONE last kiss . . . then with tender eyes we went
Forth from the shadowy house of scattered
light;

As children startled by a gruesome sight,
We wondered what the dim black waggon meant.

"A girl is dead," we heard, and this was all ;
But in my sleepless dreams she flutters past,
Like some unknown lost sister, found at last
Beyond the locked gate of a silent wall.

Had she been loved as I was loved, and died ?

(Once in his arms I thought my heart would
break !)

Could she not bear the kisses that I bore ?

IMPROVISATION

And does her lover mourn his nameless bride?
Was shame too heavy for her first love's sake?
"A girl is dead," they told us,—and no
more.

REMEMBERING THEE

To-NIGHT I lie down—broken on the wheel.

I am but dust upon the finger-tips
Of reaching Time ; or wine that Sorrow
sips—

And each day there is less of me to steal
From Life's fast-emptying cup ! To-night I feel
As a torn grave from which a spectre slips,
Or dry sea-depths wherein the last wave
drips,

Or star-bereavèd sky no sun can heal. . . .

Yea,—I am but a sword too dull for Fame
To strike with ; but a reed too poor for Song
To shake ; I am a leaf which is too tame
For Fortune's gathering,—and gold too strong

REMEMBERING THEE

With base alloy for Love to mould. . . .

And oh,

Remembering thee, a new despair I
know!

FROM THEE SO FAR

REMEMBER me as one who loved awhile
Life,—and the splendid merriment I had ;
Life,—and its throngs of people, gay and sad,
But all so quick to answer smile with smile ;
Life,—that with changeful humours did beguile
My changeful moods, and ever found me glad
To fare upon adventures, wise or mad,—
A runner laughing down the fleeting mile.

Or as a child who loved the shining toy
The gods placed in its hands, remember me ;
And if I cried at dusk to touch a star,
Forgive ! For I who was a-flame with joy
Shall lie most lonely in my shroud, and be
Far from the things I loved,—from thee so
far !

THE SISTERHOOD

A TRAGEDY

"The life of every woman is one of three tragedies—celibacy, marriage, or unchastity."—*Balzac*.

THE CELIBATE

How many Autumns o'er the grass have fled
With fading frost to wither leaf and flower?—
Since from a shadowland my mother led
The little child whom she had gone to find,
And like a weary voyager that hour
Whispered my name to those upon the shore,
Then drifted onward with an alien wind
Until the watchers saw her barque no more.

Was it the wind that swept her out to sea,—
My mother who fulfilled her duteous fate,

THE SISTERHOOD

That, Spring or Summer, chilled the heart of me ?
On softer eves I, too, have walked along
Those moon-lit paths where love and music wait ;
But ever in my soul did Shame and Fear
Reject the pleading of a lover's song,
Reject the vows I would not speak or hear.

Youth-time is past, and lovers plead no more,
Gold hair is grey, and eyes have lost their light ;
This empty heart that passion never tore
Grows humbler in its ache of loneliness ;
The high chaste visions that have filled my sight
Are fled for ever like forgotten things. . . .
I have not known great gladness, or distress,
And dove-like peace has stayed on silver wings ;

But in the twilight silences I long
To warm my cold hands at the hearth of love,
To hear again the pleading of a song ;

THE SISTERHOOD

I dream of children whom I would not bear,
And my chill death in life I weary of ;
As if within a grave my soul took root,—
I am a tree that blossomed and was fair,
I am the flowers that fell and left no fruit.

THE WIFE

As waters whirl and roughen where they meet
When a calm stream into a river swerves,
Leaving its course that winds through meadows
sweet
To join a mightier current which has torn
Its deep swift length, world-long, through rock-
bound curves,
On towards the final sea—are these, my days,
When youth flows into age, and I am borne
Through the last channel's sure relentless ways.

THE SISTERHOOD

Peace I have had the while my years ran on
Along the low shores of the fertile land,
And soon again, beneath a wintry sun,
The cold inevitable peace of age
Shall mark my seaward course. . . . I under-
stand. . . .

As waters whirl and roughen,—even so,
My life is troubled by a sullen rage
That age must come so soon, and youth must go.

I leave so much,—I, who have borne the cares
Of home-making this long time on my heart,—
A husband still in youth although he bears
More years than I ; and children who have
grown

A little heedless of my dutious part
In giving them their heritage of life ;
Now all seems futile as I stand alone—
A useless mother and an ageing wife.

THE SISTERHOOD

Oh, then, farewell,—my service-laden years!—
That after all I am not sad to leave,
Despite these childish and uncertain tears;
For at the altar was my freedom slain,
My dreams have all been shattered past retrieve,
And servitude has dulled and broken me. . . .
I am a cloud that sends a little rain
To bring forth harvests I shall never see.

THE COURTESAN

Night passes; now the thin and argent light
Drifts from the East, like smoke by breezes
blown
Forth from a valley where camp-fires are bright,
Over the flame-illumined hills of dawn.
Night passes; and at last am I alone,
And shivering beside my window here,
Where every morning with the curtains drawn
I crouch and watch the last star disappear.

THE SISTERHOOD

Stars were my birthright ; I was born to live
Beneath their glow ; at dusk my soul awakes,
And stirred and made a little mad I give
Myself each time, expectant and anew,
To one who has not come. . . . No other slakes
The restlessness of my desire for him ;
Never did maiden wait for knight to woo
With lonelier heart or eyes more often dim.

Dream-time is passing, and the sweet stars rove
Ever a little higher in the sky,
While through the fields of night I seek for
love.

My soul and body flame before a face. . . .
But ere the dawn I hear the old, old cry
That first in childhood urged my lips to kiss,
And urged my feet into the market-place
Where all men come, and where, perchance,
he is.

THE SISTERHOOD

Now I am one with all who sinned my sin,—
With vultures, drunkards, thieves, and girls in
tears,
With great dead queens, and lovers who have
been
Stayed for all time in tales and poetry. . . .
But till the Scythe mow down my weed-like years
I watch for one across the barren sands,—
Keeping a shrine beside a sterile sea,
Tending a sacred flame with impious hands.

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